



Dana Arnett:

One second here.

[Background noise]

Now, they said black tie, they got the black right but, some how. Can I have a little trombone music?

[Applause]

woo! I gotta pull these off!

[Applause]

Now I feel much better. Good evening, what a great, great gathering, so thrilled to be here and so thrilled to have our clients here accept this great award. Tonight we're here to honor the profound accomplishments and design legacy of Harley-Davidson. Many of us in this room have had the good fortune to partner with the company, firms like Carmichael Lynch, Kubala Washatko, Pentagram, I think Michael, Jim, and Abbott are here, and VSA Partners to name a few. I guess you can say that we've all shared in a very fun and rebellious ride, I for one feel very humbled to be presenting on behalf of my esteemed colleagues.

It's a rare treat in this day and age to work with a company that by the sheer mention of their name has the ability to conger up so many powerful emotions in all of us. Any emotional attachment, for that matter, is a rarity this day, but that's not particularly surprising if you know anything about Harley-Davidson.

Let me begin by openly admitting just how difficult it is to describe Harley-Davidson. Even after all these years of collaboration and hard work and even as well-known and renowned as the brand is, many find it nearly impossible to put into words what this larger than life Harley-Davidson really is. So let me tell you what Harley-Davidson is not. Harley-Davidson is not cool, you heard me correctly, Harley-Davidson is not cool. Cool lives in the short-term, cool is ephemeral and often brief, cool is a trend, and Harley-Davidson is far too smart to ever covet cool.

A Harley-Davidson motorcycle, like every human being, is not perfect, in fact, Harley riders insist on making their machines perfectly theirs and in turn more cool, more real, and more human in every way. The Harley-Davidson brand is not exclusive; to the contrary, it's purposely inclusive and so uniquely individual that it defies categorization. And perhaps, most counter intuitively, Harley-Davidson is not in the motorcycle business, Harley is in the lifestyle experience business, in fact, they define it.

Let me share a quick story that some of the folks back at the motor company would probably call lore. In the late 1960's when the custom movement was gaining a tremendous amount of momentum, Willie G. Davidson tells of being down in Daytona for Bike Week, he shares this

story and I quote, "I remember watching a motorcycle club as they pulled out of a drive-in. Everyone just froze when this guy in his outrageously pushed-forward front-end and super long rake made his way onto the street. I went nuts and it was obvious that everyone else had the same reaction. Wow where did that come from, that's impossible." He goes on, "Here's my theory why this was happening and why it's so important. Bikes have always been dramatic; thank God they're not for everybody and never will be. If there was ever a product people could make their own, take to an extreme, create a tension to express themselves, this one's logical. Combine that with what was happening in America in the late 60's and all of the elements for a revolution were there." end quote. This story illustrates a very important point, at Harley-Davidson everything starts with the motorcycle, from how the guy down in Peoria decides to accessorize his bike or decorate his leathers, to what inspires those of us who work with Harley professionally as designers, the motorcycle is the nexus of passion and creativity and it feeds the entire design process.

So, whether it's styling a new model, the design of motor clothes, the creative development of an ad or literature, or even a project as awe inspiring and as meaningful as the museum, the bike becomes the locus of inspiration providing clarity of purpose and consistency for all things conceptual. I can assure you that each and every one of those slides you saw flashed on the screen leads to that.

There's a black and white photo hanging outside of Willie G. Davidson's design studio in the styling department at Harley-Davidson, it's a shot of a hard-core biker with his shirt off, his back to the camera, in the midst of a sea of bikes. Stretched across his back, you guessed it, from neck to belt-line is a Harley-Davidson bar and shield logo tattoo. A lot of people come into the design studio and they see that photo for the first time and they remark how beautiful it is, and I guess they're right it is a very nice photograph, but I also know that Willie G. didn't hang that picture there for that reason. He'll tell you it's there as a symbol of something much more important, something we can never forget, to keep things real. If any of you see a shoulder-width tattoo logo of AT&T, or Chase Bank, or Toyota, please let me know, but for now that tattoo and the story it tells is all about being real, and that's as real as it gets folks. And that, I suppose, will be the important task for the next generation of designers who touch the Harley-Davidson brand, creating authenticity in a world overflowing in sameness.

The challenge, I suppose, is to always seek out and preserve the truth behind the actions and exploits of all those crazy gear heads and road warriors, to look beyond the traditional formulas and predictable legions associated with design and find the honesty, purpose and irreverence that makes Harley-Davidson so real, so enduring, and so loved. Willie G. Davidson will tell you that's the way it's done at Harley-Davidson, that's the secret of design, I think he's right.

Ladies and gentlemen it's been 105 years since a couple of 3 Davidson brothers and a guy named Harley got together and decided to take the work out of pedaling a bicycle, so we couldn't be happier in 2008 to celebrate the newest moment in history. Let's give a big

thumbs up and a round of applause as AIGA presents the Corporate Leadership Award to Harley-Davidson. Please welcome Willie G. Davidson, senior vice president and chief styling officer for Harley-Davidson.

[Applause]

Willie G. Davidson:

What an honor, design is my life and to be able to appear in front of this group of top-level professionals in the field is truly an honor for me, our great company, and I also am honored to share this evening with my family, my riding partner Nancy is here with me and --

[Applause]

She's been back and forth across the United States many times on the back of our beautiful bike or on her little bike, and also our daughter Karen is here who's the creative director for all of Harley-Davidson's clothing, a major part of our business.

[Applause]

The philosophy that's so important to Harley-Davidson is the fact that we are close to our customers, we are motorcycle enthusiasts, and we spend a fair amount of time on the road on our vehicles riding with our customers. We recently returned from our 105th celebration wherein the members of our leadership, a lot of our executives went to different ends of the United States and then we all rode toward Milwaukee for a huge celebration over Labor day, which was very successful, we had in excess of 130,000 people in Milwaukee and that's a lot of Harley-Davidson's.

[Laughter]

But design has always been our competitive advantage and I'm blessed to have peers in our management group that are very supportive and they understand that design is our competitive advantage and so, this support allows us to create great vehicles. And I believe that form follows function, that's obviously a statement that's used all the time by good designers, but I also have a strong feeling that form follows emotion.

We are in an emotional business; a motorcycle should do that to the buyer. And you wrap that up with our clothing and our events and all of the great things that we do for the sport and you really have created a lifestyle, and I think that we have to understand that and I believe we do it by riding. Our 105th really was a great example of a huge birthday party and in what other way could you celebrate something of that magnitude other than riding across this great country on a beautiful Harley-Davidson, that really worked very, very well for us. But, our designs are really driven number one by the motorcycles but there are so many facets that make up the HD diamond that Dana's involved in, Pentagram's here, they're certainly very much involved in it, but it's our graphics, our print, our brochures, our advertising, certainly

our new museum, which we just had on the screen which is absolutely a work of art, and Pentagram, Jim Biber thank you very much.

[Applause]

But our brand, and I'd show you mine, it's on my arm but I'm not gonna take all my clothes off, but Dana, he showed you his, but that's the center of our design universe and we treat it with great respect and I just want to say before I go sit down, thank you very much, this is a true honor for Harley-Davidson, myself, my family, and our great brand, I appreciate it very much.

[Applause]